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The Army-Navy-FBI Comint Agreements of 1942

When the United States entered the Second World War, significant measures had already been taken toward establishing a national intelligence policy, especially relating to the Western Hemisphere. On 26 June 1939, President Roosevelt had issued an order to the government departments restricting investigation of espionage and sabotage to the Army, Navy and FBI. These agencies clarified their relationship in the Delimitations Agreement of 5 June 1940, whereby the Military Intelligence Division (MID) and the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) were to have cognizance over the services' military and civilian personnel in espionage/counterespionage and sabotage matters, while the FBI would have that responsibility for civilians. Overseas the MID was to have authority for the Philippines and Panama, ONI for Guam and Samoa, and the FBI for the other territories (Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Alaska).

On 24 June 1940, President Roosevelt made broad foreign intelligence assignments. The FBI was to collect intelligence and conduct counterintelligence operations in the Western Hemisphere while all other foreign intelligence was to be the responsibility of the Army and Navy. Given this charter, the FBI began to augment its small staff in Latin America by forming the Special Intelligence Service to combat (primarily) German covert operations.

In a final pre-war directive, the President approved the formation of the Coordinator of Information (COI) in June-July 1941. The COI was renamed the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in 1942 and ultimately became the primary U.S. intelligence organization (other than Comint) of World War II.

The subject of this article will be expanded in a forthcoming volume of the Cryptologic History Series.

U.S. communications intelligence activities were not the subject of presidential directive in the pre-war period. This may be because of the extreme secrecy surrounding this activity and perhaps because the President's chief advisors on intelligence matters (such as William J. Donovan of COI and J. Edgar Hoover) were initially interested in other intelligence matters. There were, however, agreements between the Army and Navy Comint organizations. The most famous of these, arrived at in August 1940, was the agreement to divide decryption and translation of Japanese diplomatic and consular traffic on an every-other-day basis, *i.e.*, the Army on even days and the Navy on odd. A version of this system continued until the summer of 1942. On 3 October 1940, the Chief Signal Officer of the Army and the Director of Naval Communications approved proposals made by their subordinates in the Army's Signal Intelligence Service (SIS) and the Navy's Comint organization, OP-20-G, for dividing all diplomatic traffic then being intercepted. Diplomatic traffic had been the prime area of service disagreement.¹

The basic wartime agreements were reached in a roundabout fashion: they originated with questions concerning cryptanalysis of German clandestine systems in the Western Hemisphere. Since 1940, the Comint organization within the U.S. Coast Guard had been intercepting, analyzing and processing German Intelligence covert traffic to and from stations in the Western Hemisphere and Germany. The results of the

¹OP-20-G had been intercepting and attacking Japanese naval systems since the 1920s. The Army's SIS lacked the capability in 1940 to intercept or process Axis military communications and thus concentrated on diplomatic.

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USCG efforts were given to the FBI, which agency had been given authority for counterespionage operations in the hemisphere.² This intelligence was also provided, at least after a Treasury Department directive of 17 June 1941, to the MID, ONI and the State Department. During the late summer of 1941, British intelligence in the U.S. also began to receive results of the USCG operation. This was accomplished through liaison by Captain E. G. Hastings, R.N., of the British Joint Intelligence Committee in Washington.³

In March 1942, the USCG operation was merged into OP-20-G, where it remained throughout the war. Captain Hastings, seeking assurance that the British receipt of this intelligence would continue, sent representatives to discuss the situation with Commander John Redman, head of OP-20-G, and LCDR A. D. Kramer, one of his section chiefs. Kramer suggested to Redman that the first step in collaboration should be coordination of U.S. Comint efforts regarding German clandestine traffic. He suggested that the State Department should chair a coordination conference. On 28 March 1942 such a meeting was proposed by the Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear Admiral T. S. Wilkinson, in a letter to Adolph Berle, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State.⁴

A conference held in Berle's office on 2 April 1942 was attended by representatives of the Army, Navy, FBI and Federal Communications Commission. The conferees discussed the possibility of seizing German clandestine radio stations that had been located but whose traffic was being exploited. The participants agreed that no action should be taken against a station without joint approval of both the Army and Navy. James Flv, Chairman of the FCC, then raised the basic issue: should not the cryptanalytic efforts of the various government agencies be consolidated? Redman agreed that this should be done, but for German clandestine traffic only. He suggested that all work against that target should be done by the

²The FBI was also engaged in cryptanalysis against German and Japanese systems beginning in late 1940 or early 1941.

³Pre-war British-U.S. Comint arrangements are a complex topic, as are the various intelligence committees. Further, the relationship of the British Security Coordination (BSC) in New York and elsewhere with Comint is beyond the scope of this article.

⁴Berle was President Roosevelt's coordinator for certain hemisphere intelligence matters.



Adolph A. Berle, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State, was involved in Comint planning early in the war.

USCG. The FBI disagreed. Berle concluded the meeting with the recommendation that higher level action be sought to prevent the proliferation of cryptanalytic organizations and that there should be better coordination among the existing ones.

On 8 April 1942, this subject was addressed by the Interdepartmental Intelligence Conference (IIC), an MID-ONI-FBI exchange group that grew out of the Delimitations Agreement of 5 June 1940. J. Edgar Hoover requested a special conference on Comint and the IIC members then appointed a subcommittee to consider intercept, processing and dissemination. Members of the subcommittee were to be D. M. Ladd, FBI, Colonel John T. Bissell, MID, Commander Redman, Director of Naval Communications (OP-20-G was subordinate to the DNC) and LtCommander Kramer, ONI.⁵ The members were to determine if the Army, Navy (which now included the USCG) and FBI could handle the entire Comint field, to the exclusion of the COI, FCC and other agencies. Thus the FCC, an organization that was then conducting and would continue to conduct extensive intercept operations, was excluded from basic planning.

⁵Kramer was officially in ONI but indefinitely attached to OP-20-G.

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John R. Redman headed OP-20-G, the naval Comint organization, from Feb-Oct 1942.

The subcommittee which formally met on 21 April and 25 May 1942, prepared a report which surveyed the existing cryptanalytic organizations and made recommendations as to processing of intercept and dissemination. Dissemination of the finished product was to be as follows:

Type	Recipient
Diplomatic	Army, Navy, State, President
Enemy Naval	Navy
Enemy Military	Army
Western Hemisphere	
Clandestine	Army, Navy, State, FBI
International Clandestine	Army, Navy, State ⁶

Among the War Department signatories was William F. Friedman of the SIS.

The Subcommittee prepared another report on 30 June 1942. This was to be the basic national wartime agreement concerning cryptanalytic responsibilities. The report was signed by representatives of MID and SIS;

⁶COI was initially included instead of the State Department. In 1941, Captain James Roosevelt, COI liaison officer, had been on distribution for USCG Comint.

OP-20-G, USCG and ONI; and the FBI. The following allocation was made:

Type	Organization Responsible for Cryptanalysis
Diplomatic	Army
Enemy Naval Operations	Navy
Enemy Military Operations	Army
Western Hemisphere	Navy and FBI
Clandestine	
International Clandestine	Navy
Trade Codes	To be assigned by committee
Army Weather	Army
Navy Weather	Navy
Domestic Criminal	FBI
Voice Broadcast	FBI
Cover Text Communications ⁷	FBI

The agreement also provided for the creation of a standing committee on cryptanalysis to be composed of representatives of the FBI technical laboratory, OP-20-G and SIS.

The agreements were forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff by the Joint Intelligence Committee (a higher body than the IIC). The JCS then recommended to the President that he limit U.S. cryptanalysis to the Army, Navy and FBI. The President was also advised that the services had reached agreements among themselves. In a memorandum to the Director of the Budget dated 8 July 1942, the President ordered that cryptanalysis be limited to the Army, Navy and FBI and that the cryptanalytic units of the FCC, OSS and Director of Censorship be terminated.

In the meantime, Captain Hastings had ended his collaboration with OP-20-G's USCG unit regarding Western Hemisphere clandestine traffic and had entered into an exclusive arrangement with the FBI.

The significance of these agreements, especially as related to the division of cryptanalytic responsibilities, should not be over-emphasized. Even without a formal agreement, the Navy would have dealt with foreign naval systems and the Army foreign military systems. Of greatest significance was the decision to concentrate all diplomatic cryptanalysis and processing in the SIS.⁸ The

⁷This included coded communications detected by postal or cable censors.

⁸As in 1940, the Army was still not in a position to significantly exploit Axis military communications. This would soon change.

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matter of clandestine traffic was destined to remain unsolved because of lack of Navy-FBI cooperation and the constant disputes between those organizations regarding their relationship with the British. Nevertheless, the 1942 agreements were a beginning and they remained in effect throughout the war, their importance declining as other arrangements were made.

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